

The Book of ESTHER

INTRODUCTION

1. Title. The book of Esther takes as its name that of the heroine of the story. Her original Hebrew name was Hadassah (see ch. 2:7), but she probably came to be known as Esther about the time of her marriage to Ahasuerus (Xerxes), king (486–465 B.C.) of the Medo-Persian Empire (see PK 598). Her Hebrew name, Hadassah, means “myrtle,” while Esther is probably a Persian name meaning “star.” Mordecai, who had adopted Hadassah, his cousin, as his daughter, may have given her the Persian name Esther at the time he charged her not to make her nationality known (see ch. 2:10).

The book of Esther is a dramatic story of how God used a courageous young woman of surpassing beauty to save her people at a time of crisis, when extermination threatened them. As in the story of Ruth, we see the important role of women in God’s great plan for the salvation of His people. Ruth was a Gentile who decided to identify herself with Israel and to accept their God as her God, while Esther was a Jewess who, in God’s providence, became queen of the greatest nation of her time. She realized the truth and urgency of the question addressed to her by her foster father: “Who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (ch. 4:14, RSV). With a prayer to God, she courageously risked her own life to save the lives of God’s people scattered in all parts of the empire. The story of Esther stirs its readers to a realization of the opportunities God’s providence may bring to the weakest of the weak. Perhaps we too have “come to the kingdom for such a time as this.”

2. Authorship. The author of the book of Esther is unknown. The author’s profound concern for the welfare of the Jewish people at a time of national crisis points to him as one of that race. His identification of Mordecai as a Benjamite (ch. 2:5) may suggest that he himself was of the tribe of Benjamin. The fact that the Jews “scattered abroad” (ch. 3:8) alone are mentioned, and never those of Jerusalem and Judea, implies that he was concerned exclusively with the former, and was therefore perhaps one of them. The many Persian words in the book, together with its intimate knowledge of Persian affairs and customs, suggest that he was a resident of Persia proper rather than of one of the outlying provinces of the empire. Recent excavations at Susa (Shushan) confirm the fact that the writer was intimately acquainted with the palace and with Persian court customs and regulations. Impressed by these archeological discoveries, various scholars are inclined to think that the author of the book must have been attached to the Persian court at that time or soon after, at least as a minor official, or that he had direct access to this information through someone who was.

It is possible that the author was Ezra, who led an expedition to Jerusalem in the seventh year of Artaxerxes I (457 B.C.). Ezra was a learned authority on Jewish law (see Ezra 7:1–14), and may have served as a royal clerk, probably as a legal counselor of the king (see PK 607). It is apparent that under any circumstances Artaxerxes had great confidence in him (see Ezra 7:25–28). The crisis occasioned by Haman probably came in the year 474/473 B.C., some 16 or 17 years prior to Ezra’s departure for Jerusalem. It is therefore reasonable to think that Ezra was sufficiently familiar with the details of the story to have written it. As a zealous patriot (Ezra 7:27, 28), a devout priest (vs. 1–5), a pious reformer (chs. 9:1 to 10:14), a “ready scribe” (ch. 7:6), and an able administrator (vs. 6, 10, 21, 25, 26), Ezra must have taken a profound interest in this crisis, which came

when he was a young man. Certainly he was qualified to write the book of Esther. Again, Nehemiah may have been the author.

From the postscript to the book of Esther (ch. 10) it may be inferred that Ahasuerus (Xerxes) was dead at the time of writing, for “all the acts of his power and of his might” were “written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia.” If this be true, then the book of Esther was written after 465 B.C., in which year Ahasuerus was assassinated by his courtier Artabanus. It is implied also that the Persian Empire was still the great world power; the book would accordingly have been written before the fall of Persia in 331 B.C. The numerous intimate details of the narrative, many of which are now confirmed by archeology, suggest, however, that the writing was done soon after the events occurred, probably by someone personally acquainted with one or more persons named in the story.

Some have suggested that Mordecai might have been the author. The fact that he is known to have held minor court offices (Esther 2:11, 19, 21–23; 3:2–5; 4:1, 2, 6; 5:13) prior to his promotion to be prime minister of the realm (chs. 8:1, 2, 7–10, 15; 9:3, 4, 20, 31; 10:3) would account adequately for the obvious familiarity of the author with the palace and with court customs and regulations. Furthermore, Mordecai is the only person specifically mentioned in the Bible as having this intimate familiarity and also having access to the official texts of the various decrees referred to. Certainly, Mordecai *could* have written the book of Esther.

A cuneiform tablet now in the Berlin Museum mentions a high state official by the name of *Marduka* (the Babylonian transliteration of Mordecai), who, with the title *sipûr*, served as an influential counselor at the court of Shushan in the time of Xerxes. No other person by this name, and holding this office in Susa under Xerxes, is known, either in the Bible or from other sources.

At the order of Ahasuerus, and in the royal name and with the royal seal, Esther and Mordecai sent official decrees to all parts of the realm explaining the sudden change in royal policy and authorizing the Jews to defend themselves (ch. 8:9–14; cf. ch. 9:31, 32). Some have thought that what is now known as the book of Esther may have been included in the messages sent out to the Jews by Esther and Mordecai, but the references noted hardly seem to justify such a conclusion. But it is entirely possible that Mordecai may have written the book of Esther in addition to the particular documents noted in the book. The fact that he is referred to in the third person throughout the book has no bearing upon the question of whether he may have been its author.

Thus, when all is said and done, the author of the book of Esther remains unknown. All that can be said with certainty is that he must have been a Jew living in Shushan about the time the events narrated in the book occurred.

3. Historical Setting. At the death of Darius I (Hystaspes, or, “the Great”) in 486 B.C. his son Xerxes ascended the throne and ruled until his death in 465 B.C., and was in turn succeeded by his son Artaxerxes. The Ahasuerus of the Bible is thus the Xerxes of history. The name Ahasuerus is from the Latin transliteration of *’Ahashwerosh*, the Hebrew equivalent of the Babylonian *Achshiyarshu*. The translators of the LXX confused Ahasuerus with Artaxerxes. The Ahasuerus of the books of Ezra and Esther is not the Ahasuerus of Dan. 9:1, who was the father of Darius the Mede.

During the closing years of the reign of Darius Hystaspes and the early part of the reign of his son and successor, Xerxes (Ahasuerus), the Persian Empire was at the height of its power. According to Esther 1:1 the domain of Ahasuerus extended from the northwestern frontier of India westward to the northern boundary of Ethiopia. From east to west its length was 3,000 mi., and in width it varied from 500 to 1,500 mi. Its area was about 2,000,000 sq. mi. Shushan (Susa) was one of the capitals of the Persian Empire, an honor it shared with Ecbatana and Persepolis. The Persians were a branch of the Indo-European family of races, and were the first of that group, in fact, to become the dominant world power. For a further consideration of the period of Persian history in which the events of the book of Esther occurred, see pp. 59–61.

From the viewpoint of Bible history the chief event during the reign of Cyrus (c. 553–530 B.C.), first king of the Persian Empire, was the decree of his first regnal year authorizing the Jews to return to Palestine (see pp. 96, 97), and to rebuild the Temple (Ezra 5:13). Pursuant to this decree Zerubbabel led some 50,000 Jews back to Judea in 536 and began the rebuilding of the Temple (Ezra 1:5, 6; 3:1–10). After a time, however, work came to a halt as the result of various difficulties and discouragements that arose (see Ezra 4:1–5, 24; cf. Haggai 1:1–4). So far as the Jews were concerned the reign of Cambyses (530–522), son and successor of Cyrus, was of minor importance, for he seems to have taken little if any interest in their welfare. But soon after Darius Hystaspes (522–486) ascended the throne he confirmed the original decree of Cyrus by issuing one of his own (see Ezra 4:24; 6:1), which resulted in the completion of the Zerubbabel Temple in 515 B.C. (see Ezra 6:1, 15).

Early in the 5th century Athens assisted the Greeks living on the west coast of Asia Minor in their struggle to be free from Persian rule. Darius met this challenge to his power by leading an army into Greece to punish the Athenians. With an army of insignificant size the Athenians met the mighty hosts of Persia on the beach at Marathon and administered to the invaders a decisive defeat that made necessary the immediate withdrawal of Darius to Asia (490 B.C.). While making preparations for a new invasion of Greece, however, Darius died (486 B.C.). His son and successor, Xerxes I, or Ahasuerus (486–465 B.C.), returned to Greece, only to suffer a major defeat at Salamis (480 B.C.). Xerxes thereupon returned permanently to Asia, leaving his general Mardonius in charge. Mardonius was defeated at Plataea the following year, and as a result Persian forces left Europe never to return.

The great feast in the third year of Xerxes (Ahasuerus) seems to have been held shortly before he left Shushan (Susa) on his disastrous expedition to Greece. It was no doubt prior to his departure in 482/481 B.C. that the command was issued to “gather together all the fair young virgins” (Esther 2:3). To carry out fully this decree undoubtedly required several months. Soon after Xerxes’ return to Susa, apparently, Esther was brought before him and made queen.

Continued reverses at the hands of the Athenian fleet on the western shores of Asia Minor, during the next few years, together with disturbances elsewhere in the far-flung empire, may have conditioned the mind of the king to look with favor upon Haman’s plan to exterminate the Jews. This plan, if carried into effect, would have marked a direct reversal of the former friendly and even generous policy of Persian monarchs toward the Jews, as demonstrated during the reigns of Cyrus and Darius. The signal deliverance of the Jews through the courage of Esther served to restore the Jews to royal favor and

prepared the way for the labors of Ezra and Nehemiah a few years later, and particularly for the momentous decree of Xerxes' son and successor, Artaxerxes I (465–423 B.C.), in the year 457 B.C.

The chronological data supplied by the book of Esther are as follows:

Event	Esther	Year–	Month–	Day		B.C. Date*
The great feast	1:3	3			Between	Apr. 14, 483–Apr. 2, 482
Esther summoned	2:12	[6	10	?)	“	Jan. 2, 479–Jan. 30, 479
Esther made queen	2:16	7	10		“	Dec. 22, 479–Jan. 20, 478
Haman casts lots	3:7	12	1		“	Apr. 5, 474–May 3, 474
Haman's decree	3:12	12†	1	13		Apr. 17, 474
Mordecai's decree	8:9	12†	3	23		June 25, 474
Purim	3:13; 8:12; 9:1, 17-19	12†	12	13		March 8, 473

4. Theme. The Babylonian captivity marks a distinct break in Jewish national life. For a time the stream of Jewish history disappeared and ran underground, and when it reappeared its whole character was changed. The Jews were no longer so much a nation as they were a people and a church. The Bible contains no history of the Exile and of postexilic times, as history is usually defined, but the spirit of the period is admirably conveyed in the narratives of Daniel and Esther. The book of Esther is one of the five rolls that have been, from ancient times, read in every synagogue on the five festal occasions of the year. It seems to have been this annual cycle of readings that determined the location of Esther in the Hebrew canon. The order of the five is: Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther. The book of Esther comes fifth because it is read at the final festival of the year, the days of Purim (see on chs. 3:7; 9:26).

Considered as literature the book of Esther is at once both an idyl and an epic. It depicts a crisis in the fortunes of God's people that threatened them with annihilation. The instrument of deliverance is a Jewess, elevated from a quiet life with her cousin and foster father, Mordecai, to be queen of a world empire. The narrative displays Esther as a woman of clear judgment, remarkable self-control, and noble self-sacrifice. The challenge of Mordecai, "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (ch. 4:14), projected the youthful queen to the heights of heroic action. In solemn dignity her spirit rose to answer the demand of the hour in the courageous and thrilling words, "If I perish, I perish." When at the critical moment the scepter was held out to her she did not immediately identify the villain, but with remarkable restraint and deliberate care guided the king and Haman into a situation calculated to be most favorable to her purpose. Fiction could not conceive of a more dramatic and surprising

series of coincidences than those that led up to the exposure and death of Haman. In Purim, the Feast of Lots, the Jews ever commemorate Heaven's disposal of Haman's evil plan, which a "lot" had presumably indicated would succeed (see ch. 3:7).

The religious character and moral teaching of the book of Esther may be summarized thus:

1. Though God's name does not appear in the entire book, His providence is manifest throughout. No disbeliever in God could possibly have written the book; no believer can read it without finding his faith strengthened. Deliverance is presented by the writer as the result of a living faith in God.
2. The book of Esther provides an account of the origin of an important Jewish national festival, the Feast of Purim, which is still observed with rejoicing each year.
3. A vital moral lesson pervades the narrative. With the passing of Haman's brief day of popularity the transitory nature of earthly power and prosperity becomes painfully evident. God humbles the proud and exalts those who trust in Him.
4. The providence of God is strikingly displayed. Divine power is united with human effort. The means used are human, but the deliverance itself is divine.

Outline of the Book.

- I. Esther Made Queen of Persia, 1:1 to 2:20.
 - A. The official feast of 180 days, 1:1–4.
 - B. The public feast of 7 days, 1:5–9.
 - C. Vashti's refusal to appear before Ahaseurus, 1:10–12.
 - D. Vashti deposed as queen, 1:13–22.
 - E. The search for a new queen, 2:1–4.
 - F. Esther taken to the palace, 2:5–11.
 - G. Esther made queen of the realm, 2:12–20.
- II. Haman's Plot to Exterminate the Jews, 2:21 to 3:15.
 - A. Mordecai, a royal officer, saves the life of Ahaseurus, 2:21–23.
 - B. Haman's promotion; his resentment toward Mordecai, 3:1–5.
 - C. Haman's plot to take revenge on Mordecai's race, 3:6–11.
 - D. Haman's decree of extermination against the Jews 3:12–15.
- III. Esther Champions the Cause of Her People, 4:1 to 5:8.
 - A. In consternation, the Jews fast at Haman's decree, 4:1–3.
 - B. Mordecai appeals to Esther, 4:4–14.
 - C. Esther accepts the challenge, 4:15–17.
 - D. Esther entertains the king and Haman at a banquet, 5:1–8.
- IV. The Fall of Haman, 5:9 to 7:10.
 - A. Haman's plot to hang Mordecai, 5:9–14.
 - B. Ahasuerus reminded of Mordecai's loyal service, 6:1–3.
 - C. Haman compelled to honor Mordecai, 6:4–11.
 - D. Haman warned of the failure of his plot, 6:12–14.
 - E. Esther accuses Haman before Ahasuerus, 7:1–8.
 - F. The execution of Haman, 7:9, 10.
- V. The Triumph of the Jews Over Their Enemies, 8:1 to 10:3.
 - A. Countermanding the decree of Haman, 8:1–14.
 - B. Mordecai advanced and his people restored to favor, 8:15–17.
 - C. The deliverance and rejoicing of the Jews, 9:1–19.

- D. Proclamation of the Feast of Purim, 9:20–32.
- E. Mordecai made prime minister of Persia, 10:1–3.

CHAPTER 1

1 *Ahasuerus maketh royal feasts.* 10 *Vashti, sent for, refuseth to come.* 13 *Ahasuerus, by the counsel of Memucan, maketh the decree of men's sovereignty.*

1. *Ahasuerus.* Heb. 'Achashwerosh, a transliteration of the Persian *Khshayâreshâ*. In some Babylonian tablets the spelling is *Achshiyarshu*. In the consonantal alphabet of the Elephantine papyri the name appears as *Chshy'rsh* and *Chshyrsh*. The meaning of the name is not known. In Greek *Khshayâreshâ* became *Xerxes*, and in Latin, *Assuerus*. The names Xerxes and Ahasuerus are therefore equivalent, the one coming from the Persian through the Greek, and the other through both Hebrew and Latin (see PK 598).

This is. The writer of the book of Esther seems to have known of more than one ruler named Ahasuerus. The Ahasuerus of the book of Esther is not to be confused with the Ahasuerus of Dan. 9:1, who lived half a century earlier. On the Ahasuerus of Ezra 4:6 see Additional Note on Ezra 4.

2. *The throne of his kingdom.* The Persian monarch resided part of the year at Ecbatana and sometimes visited Persepolis and Babylon, but Shushan (Susa) was at this time the seat of government (see Dan. 8:2; Esther 9:12).

Shushan the palace. Shushan was in the province of Elam (see Dan. 8:2), about 100 mi. (161 km.) north of the present shore line of the Persian Gulf, and a little more than 200 mi. (322 km.) east of Babylon. Originally the capital of Elam, centuries before the time of Esther, the city was situated at the eastern edge of the Tigris valley where the latter rises to meet the Iranian hills. Amid its extensive ruins, which cover an area of more than 3 sq. mi. (4.8 sq. km.), may be seen what remains of the spacious palace in which much of the dramatic narrative of the book of Esther took place. This palace, erected on the site of the former Elamite castle, was originally built by Darius Hystaspes, predecessor of Xerxes. For a brief description of it, see on vs. 5, 6.

3. *The third year.* This year ran from approximately April 14, 483 B.C., to April 2, 482 B.C. Perhaps the "feast," which continued for six months, began in the early spring of the year when the rains were past and travel would be easier and more pleasant.

A feast. Or, "banquet." The word originally meant a "drinking bout." In view of the fact that Ahasuerus left Shushan a year or two later for his invasion of Greece (see Introduction to Esther), it has been suggested that the princes, governors, and army chiefs were called in from all parts of the realm to participate in planning what all fully expected to be a brilliant and successful campaign. Herodotus (vii. 8) records that Xerxes convened such a council. Perhaps the various officials were summoned in relays over the six months' period, each for the purpose of discussing with the king his particular responsibility in connection with the campaign. It would be most improbable to find all the officials of the vast empire gathered together thus except for specific political and military discussions.

Princes. Or, "[appointed] officials."

Servants. That is, his "courtiers."

Power. Heb. *chayil*, “host” (Ex. 14:4), “army” (v. 9), “valiant [man]” (1 Sam. 16:18), etc. If one objective of the feast was, as suggested, the laying of plans for the coming Greek campaign, Ahasuerus would certainly include his chief military officers.

Persia and Media. This order, the reverse of that in Daniel (chs. 5:28; 6:8, 12, 15; 8:20), appears repeatedly in the Esther narrative (ch. 1:3, 14, 18, 19) and implies that the account belongs to the time when Persia had replaced Media as the leading partner in the dual empire (see Dan. 7:5; 8:3). In Esther 10:2 the original order is given, perhaps because in “the chronicles” the Median kings came first.

Nobles. From a Persian word adopted into the Hebrew language, meaning “the first [men].”

Princes of the provinces. That is, the governors, or satraps, in charge of conquered territories. History attests the presence of the satraps at a great convocation in Susa prior to the disastrous campaign against Greece.

4. Shewed the riches. Ostentation was characteristic of Xerxes. Vain display marked the huge army with which he invaded Greece. The fabulous wealth of Persia is commented on by contemporary writers of various nationalities. Among the glories of the Persian palace were the walls draped with gold, the marble pillars and rich hangings, a golden plane tree and a golden vine. Excavations at Susa (Shushan) have proved that the writer of Esther was intimately acquainted with the palace and with Persian court customs and regulations, since the descriptions he gives agree to the last detail with the results of archeological investigation. Impressed by this fact, scholars affirm that only someone who knew the royal palace personally, or who knew someone who did, could have given the story its accurate setting.

An hundred and fourscore days. It is not necessary to suppose that the same persons were entertained throughout this whole period. It would hardly be safe for the provincial governors all to leave their provinces at the same time, and to remain away for that length of time. It is probable that Ahasuerus entertained a succession of guests during the six months that the “feast” continued.

5. A feast. Perhaps Ahasuerus’ purpose was to secure the loyalty of the subjects of the capital city during his extended absence in Greece. If so, this was an astute political move. Only males, of course, were included, for Queen Vashti gave a separate banquet for the women (v. 9).

The court of the garden. The ruins of Xerxes’ palace are sufficiently well preserved to make possible a description of some of its parts. The king’s gate in which Mordecai sat, the court where Esther appeared unbidden—these and some other sections of the palace have been located.

The palace are occupied approximately 300 yards on each side. The main gate lay to the south.

To the northeast of the palace proper was the spacious *apadâna*, or throne hall. This immense building, 330 ft. on a side, was probably reached by stairs of gigantic proportions. The flat roof of the central part was supported by 36 slender, fluted columns with carved capitals, and arranged in 6 rows of 6 columns each. The front of the building was perhaps open, whereas the rear and side walls were of brick, faced with enamel friezes. Gold, silver, and precious stones were used lavishly in the decoration of the throne hall. Greek writers tell of a golden plane tree and a golden vine in this court. To

the northwest of the palace proper, it is thought, was the “garden,” or park. It was in and about the *apadâna* that many of the incidents related in the book of Esther occurred.

6. *White, green, and blue, hangings.* Literally, “white cotton and violet [material].” The word rendered “green” in the KJV is from the Sanskrit word for “cotton.” Note that the word “hangings” is supplied. These “hangings,” or awnings, were probably made of white and violet cotton fabric.

Cords of fine linen and purple. Strong “cords” would be required to support the awning if it extended, as some have thought, from the central pillared hall across the mosaic-paved court, a space of nearly 60 ft.

Pillars of marble. The pillars at Shushan were of dark-blue limestone. The Hebrew word *shesh*, “marble,” probably refers to this limestone or alabaster rather than to what we usually think of as “marble.”

Pavement. The four Hebrew words translated “red,” “blue,” “white,” and “black” do not denote colors, but the various kinds of stone and other materials in the mosaic pavement. Dark-blue limestone is mentioned as being used in the pavement as well as for the pillars.

7. *Vessels of gold.* Golden goblets were found in considerable numbers in the Persian camp near Plataea by the victorious Greeks.

Diverse one from another. This detail must have come from an eyewitness, or from one who had received an account of the banquet from an eyewitness.

Royal wine. Or, “wine of the kingdom,” that is, from the royal cellar.

8. *According to the law.* The king made an edict, it would seem, that each guest should drink as much as he wished to personally, rather than vie with the others in a drinking bout.

9. *Vashti the queen.* The only wife of Xerxes of whom the Greeks made record was Amestris. Xerxes had married her before ascending the throne, when he became of marriageable age. Herodotus and Ctesias speak of her cruelty and dissolute ways. However it cannot be proved that Amestris and Vashti were the same person. Like Esther (see ch. 2:7), the queen may have been known by more than one name.

10. *Chamberlains.* Literally, “eunuchs,” who alone would have access to the women’s quarters. The derivation and meaning of the names of these eunuchs are doubtful. Eunuchs were often foreign slaves deliberately mutilated for sale on the Persian market. The Persians considered the number 7 sacred.

11. *Bring Vashti.* Having displayed the wealth and glory of his kingdom, Ahasuerus’ thoughts finally turned to his beautiful queen. The display of her beauty would, he thought, climax the exhibition.

12. *Vashti refused.* The reason for the queen’s refusal is not clear. Some have suggested that Ahasuerus intended an immodest display of Vashti’s beauty, but the context provides no clue as to whether this was his purpose. The Jewish targums, however, assume that her motive for refusing to appear was her desire to avoid such a display. Josephus attributes her refusal to what he, mistakenly, thought to be a Persian custom, one that presumably prohibited married women from associating with strangers. Other ancient Jewish writers set forth a variety of imaginary or preposterous explanations, none of which warrant serious consideration.

Ahasuerus’ order specifying that Vashti wear the royal crown (v. 11) implies that he was thinking of her, not merely as a beautiful woman, but also as the first woman of the

land. That it was actually good taste for Persian women to appear at the banquet table with strangers is evident from Esther 5:4. Chaldean wives and concubines also joined their husbands in drunken feasting (Dan. 5:2). According to Neh. 2:1–6 the queen of Ahasuerus' son and successor, Artaxerxes I, accompanied her lord at wine. Several Greek writers confirm the presence of Persian women at feasts. Herodotus, a contemporary of Ahasuerus, speaks of Amestris (see on Esther 1:9) at the king's birthday feast (ix. 110). There is no reason for thinking that contemporary Persian custom secluded women, and that it would therefore have been improper for Vashti to appear when summoned, in spite of the fact that the men were drinking (see ch. 7:7).

The fact that Vashti held a banquet for the women of Shushan simultaneously with that of Ahasuerus for the men implies cooperation with his policy in promoting popular loyalty to the throne. Nothing in the record gives a clue to the reason for Vashti's refusal to obey the king's command.

His anger burned. See on Gen. 4:5.

13. *Wise men.* That is, the king's advisers. Angry as he is, Ahasuerus seeks counsel. In the presence of his whole court it would be unseemly for him to vent his passion in violent words and threats. Instead of issuing a hasty order, he proceeds deliberately to consider what steps should be taken. Ahasuerus seems to have relied heavily on his counselors (see chs. 3:8–10; 8:1–8; 9:12–14), and now invites the opinion of his "wise men" as to how to deal with Vashti.

Knew the times. Persons of learning and experience who were acquainted with precedents and knew what would be the proper thing to do on any particular occasion.

The king's manner. That is, his method of proceeding. Each matter that concerned the king he submitted to learned men for their opinion before making his decision. It was probably a general usage of the Persian monarchy to which the writer here makes reference, rather than the practice of Ahasuerus only.

14. *The seven princes.* Ezra also credits the Persian monarch with seven special counselors (see Ezra 7:14), who might be considered the king's cabinet. Herodotus observed that there were seven leading families in Persia whose heads had special privileges.

Saw the king's face. Among the special privileges of these men, one of the most valued was that of free access to the monarch at all times.

15. *According to law.* The king did not wish to appear vindictive. Furthermore, the rulers of Persia were in a certain sense limited monarchs (see Esther 1:19; 8:8; cf. Dan. 6:8–16). It is as if the king said, Let us put aside all feeling and simply consider what the law requires. If a queen disobeys the king openly in the face of his court, what, according to proper legal procedure, should be done to her? Back of this emphasis on law was the boast of the Medo-Persian government that Medo-Persian laws were unchangeable.

16. *Memucan answered.* Memucan is spokesman for the entire group of seven special counselors. In his answer he implies that Persian law provided no penalty for the case at hand. It had not, in fact, contemplated a case of this kind. There was no precedent.

To the king only. On behalf of the seven counselors, Memucan takes the matter away from being simply one of a personal grudge on the part of the king, and raises it to the level of a matter of state. He thus exonerates the king of vindictiveness and provides a basis in common law for dealing with the case.

17. *Despise their husbands.* Literally, “cause to be despised their lords in their eyes.” Memucan here implies that Vashti had despised Ahasuerus. Whether he refers to Vashti’s motive for not obeying the royal command or simply to the act itself is not clear.

18. *The ladies.* Heb. *śaroth*, plural of *śarah*, “princess” (see on Gen. 17:15). The “princesses” would speak discourteously to their husbands, the princes. The writer is careful to refer to Persia before Media (see on Esther 1:3).

Too much contempt and wrath. Or, “contempt and wrath in plenty” (RSV), that is, contempt on the part of the wives and wrath on the part of the husbands.

19. *A royal commandment.* Literally, “a command of the kingdom.” Under ordinary circumstances such a matter as the disgrace of a favorite wife would have been settled in the secrecy of the seraglio, without calling general attention to it. In Memucan’s opinion the publicity of Vashti’s disobedience made it expedient that she be dealt with publicly.

Be written. An edict concerning an individual was hardly a suitable thing to add to a national code of laws, but decrees of a temporary nature were sometimes attached to the code, apparently for the express purpose of giving them force by rendering them unalterable (Dan. 6:8, 9).

Come no more. Vashti was to be banished, not from the palace, but from the king’s presence. This, together with the loss of her favored position as queen, would bring supreme disgrace. Beauty alone could not save her (see on v. 12).

20. *The king’s decree.* Here the “commandment” of the previous verse is called a “decree.”

For it is great. Or, “vast as it is” (RSV).

21. *The king did.* Vashti was separated, but not divorced, from the king. The grounds for this action were published throughout the provinces, so that none might misunderstand. Ahasuerus’ care in handling the case suggests the idea that Vashti may have been the daughter of a prominent Persian whose support the king sought to retain, or perhaps the daughter of the prince of one of his subject peoples.

22. *For he sent.* More exactly, “and he sent.” Besides publishing the decree, Xerxes issued with it a covering letter designed to safeguard the realm against the dangers Memucan had pointed out (see v. 18).

CHAPTER 2

1 *Out of the choice of virgins a queen is to be chosen.* 5 *Mordecai the nursing father of Esther.* 8 *Esther is preferred by Hegai before the rest.* 12 *The manner of purification, and going in to the king.* 15 *Esther best pleasing the king is made queen.* 21 *Mordecai discovering a treason is recorded in the chronicles.*

1. *After these things.* Vashti had ceased to be queen, but Ahasuerus seemed to be in no haste to confer upon anyone else the dignity that had been hers. His harem was no doubt well supplied with wives and concubines, but none stood out above the rest. Ahasuerus probably “remembered Vashti,” either upon becoming sober again, or after the lapse of a considerable period of time. How long this was after the rejection of Vashti as queen is not stated. That had been in the third year of his reign. (ch. 1:3), and Esther came to the palace in response to the royal summons in the sixth year (ch. 2:12, 16). For a considerable portion of this time Ahasuerus (Xerxes) was away from Shushan on his ill-fated Greek campaign (see Introduction to Esther). In view of the fact that Esther probably arrived at the palace before Ahasuerus’ return (he left Greece in Oct. or Nov.,

480 B.C., and Esther came to the palace in January, 479 B.C.), it is probable that the gathering of the virgins took place during his absence.

He remembered Vashti. Ahasuerus may have considered bringing Vashti back and making her queen again. Had he done so the officers who had proposed her humiliation would have been in danger. Vashti's disgrace had been their doing; her return to power would accordingly have meant their undoing—dismissal, if not execution.

2. Fair young virgins. This proposal was certain to be most agreeable to an Oriental monarch like Xerxes. Furthermore, the suggestion that he might find someone even more beautiful and to his liking than Vashti would take his thoughts away from her, and thus safeguard the interests of the men who had proposed her humiliation.

3. The house of the women. In an Oriental palace the harem was always separate from the residence of the king and other men, usually in another building. Their establishment was presided over by eunuchs, often called "chamberlains." In the palace of Xerxes the harem was situated in the northeastern quarter of the palace area (see on ch. 1:5).

Chamberlain. Literally, "eunuch," that is, one of the royal eunuchs (see ch. 1:10), to whom the king assigned special responsibilities.

Keeper of the women. Strictly speaking, Hege (or Hegai, v. 8) seems to have been keeper of the virgins only. Another royal eunuch was in charge of the women who had been presented to the king (v. 14).

Things for purification. Or, "ointments" or "cosmetics." See the list in v. 12. Persian kings may have considered themselves demigods, and thought it necessary even for virgins to undergo an extended period of "purification" before they were fit to consort with the king.

5. A certain Jew. Abruptly, the scene changes from the court of Persia to a humble Jewish home somewhere in the capital. So far as is known no Jews were ever taken captive to Shushan, and the Jews who lived there probably did so by choice. According to Jewish tradition, Mordecai was engaged in some commercial enterprise before destiny linked him with the Persian court.

Mordecai. On the possible identification of Mordecai as the *Marduka* of a cuneiform tablet, see Introduction, p. 458.

Mordecai was a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin destined to occupy a place of honor in the annals of his people. It is not certain whether the ancestor of Mordecai "carried away from Jerusalem [to Babylon] with the captivity" (v. 6) was Kish or Jair; Hebrew syntax would permit either. If it be Kish, then Kish was Mordecai's grandfather. Three or four generations would appropriately span the 118 years that intervened. If, on the other hand, it be Jair, then Shimei and Kish were pre-captivity ancestors of Mordecai, whose precise relationship is not known. In the latter case the genealogy here given would not represent Mordecai's immediate ancestors but others further removed from him, given to identify his family descent. This practice accords with Hebrew custom (see on Matt. 1:8, 17). In the Bible the terms "father" and "son" do not always indicate immediate relationship, but often simply ancestry and descent (see Vol. I, p. 181, and on Gen. 37:35). It is possible that Kish was a distant ancestor of Mordecai.

Nearly 60 years prior to the events narrated in the book of Esther, Cyrus decreed that all Jews desirous of doing so might return to Palestine, but Mordecai's parents had chosen to remain in the land of their captivity. This seems to have been the case with the

vast majority of the Jewish people (see PK 598). When Mordecai's cousin, Hadassah (Esther; see Introduction, p. 457), was left an orphan he adopted her and reared her as if she were his own child.

Some have identified Mordecai with Matacas (or Natacas), whom the Greek historian Ctesias speaks of as an influential minister of Xerxes. While working on certain cuneiform tablets in the Berlin Museum, Prof. A. Ungnad found a text that mentions a certain man named Marduka (the Babylonian transliteration for Mordecai) as one of the high state officials in Shushan during the reign of Xerxes. His title, *sîpîr*, indicates high rank and influence (see Introduction, p. 458). The presence of a man of influence bearing the same name, living in the same city at the same time, is significant.

6. The captivity. There were three captivities: the first in 605 B.C., when Daniel was taken, the second in 597 B.C., when Jehoiachin was made prisoner, and the third in 586 B.C., when Zedekiah was taken and Jerusalem was burned. Mordecai's ancestors had been taken to Babylon in the second captivity, 118 years previously.

7. Hadassah. *Hadassah* was Esther's original Hebrew name (see Introduction, p. 457). It is from the root *hadas*, "myrtle," with the usual feminine ending *ah*.

Esther. Heb. *'Ester*. This may possibly be a Persian loan word. It closely resembles *Stâreh*, a modern Persian name meaning "star." This name is transliterated into Greek as *Aster* or *Esther* (LXX). The Greek root *aster* appears in such English words as "aster," "star," and "asteroid," which means "starlike." The Babylonian form of the word was *Ishtar*, which became *'Ashtoreth* (plural *'Ashtaroth*) and *Astartē* in Greek. In Babylon the planet Venus was deified as *Ishtar*. Mordecai's selection of a Persian name may have been due to a desire to conceal Esther's Jewish ancestry (v. 10).

Fair. Heb. *yephath-to'ar*, from *yaphah*, "beautiful," and *to'ar*, "something gazed at," "form." Perhaps the expression translated "fair" might better be rendered, "beautiful of form."

Beautiful. Heb. *ṭobath mar'eh*, literally, "good of appearance," or "good of features."

8. His decree. Literally, "his law." The same word occurs in the expression, "the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not" (Dan. 6:8, 12).

9. Pleased him. Literally, "was good in his eyes."

Obtained kindness. This phrase is peculiar to the book of Esther. In v. 17 the word here given as "kindness" is translated "favour" (see also ch. 5:2).

Speedily gave her. Hegai seems to have been partial to Esther from the start. Knowing the king's preferences, he apparently recognized in Esther the one who would be selected, and proceeded at once to treat her as the future queen.

Such things as belonged to her. Literally, as in the margin, "her portions." By this is probably meant her daily allowance of food.

Meet to be given. This was the favor shown Esther by the keeper of the women. He selected for Esther the most suitable maidens as her attendants.

The best place. The "best place" in the harem could be none other than that reserved for the queen.

10. Had not shewed. The king would not be likely to favor a representative of a subject race (see v. 20). Ur of Chaldea, the home of Abraham, was 150 mi. (240 km.) southwest of Susa, and in general appearance Esther no doubt closely resembled many native inhabitants of the region.

11. Mordecai walked. The context implies that Mordecai was already one of the minor officials who waited at the king's gates to do his bidding. Mordecai nevertheless contrived to find time to leave the main entrance to the palace long enough to visit the court in front of the harem, that he might see Esther or at least obtain news concerning her (see on v. 5).

12. Oil of myrrh. Myrrh was highly esteemed by the ancients both for its scent and for its supposed purifying power. In Egypt it was used in the process of embalming the dead (see on Gen. 50:2). The Jews used it as one of the chief ingredients of their "holy anointing oil" (Ex. 30:23–25). Dresses and beds were scented with it (Ps. 45:8; Prov. 7:17).

Sweet odours. The word thus translated is rendered "spices" in S. of Sol. 4:16.

13. Whatsoever she desired. Some commentators suggest that each virgin was privileged to retain whatever jewels and garments she chose to wear upon this occasion.

14. Second house. That is, the harem proper, where the permanent wives and concubines of the king lived.

15. The uncle of Mordecai. Literally, "the paternal uncle," or "father's brother." Abihail, Esther's father, was perhaps a brother of Jair (see on v. 5).

She required nothing. Esther accepted the judgment of Hegai without question, in spite of her privilege to wear clothing and jewels of her own choice.

16. The month Tebeth. This corresponded to the latter part of December and the first part of January. In the seventh year of Ahasuerus, Tebeth began on Dec. 22 (479 B.C.) and ended Jan. 20 (478 B.C.). Having returned from the disastrous Greek expedition the year before, he was no doubt content to dismiss military matters from his thoughts.

17. All the women. Including, no doubt, all his former secondary wives and his concubines as well as all the virgins who had thus far come to him.

Made her queen. The king was content with Esther, and seems to have made her queen without waiting to see any other virgins.

18. A great feast. A wedding feast, that is, for Esther.

Made a release. The king remitted the usual levy of tribute in honor of Esther's coronation. It was a royal custom in Persia to give the queen a tenth of all fines paid to the king. With this, the queen provided her wardrobe and other wants.

According to the state of the king. Literally, "according to the hand of the king," that is, "in right royal fashion." The practice of making presents, so common in the East at all times, was much in vogue among the Persians.

19. The virgins. Literally, "virgins," without the definite article. Thus an additional levy of virgins is alluded to. This occurred between Jan., 478 B.C. and April, 474 B.C.

The king's gate. In other words, Mordecai became—if he was not already (see on v. 11)—a palace attendant or minor official. The gate of a palace was where the royal offices were located and state business was transacted (see on Gen. 19:1).

20. Esther did. Profound respect for her benefactor led Esther to cherish his counsel even after she became queen. This fact speaks well of Mordecai as a foster parent, and of Esther as a loyal and obedient daughter. Her beauty was essentially beauty of character

and personality; beauty of appearance was incidental. Too often parental laxity on the one hand or overbearing strictness on the other, implants in young people the desire to be free from restraint, and cultivates waywardness and delinquency. Happy the home where parental authority is balanced with respect for the individuality of its youth, where parental control is exercised with the objective of developing self-control. Like Esther, such youth leave home with well-balanced personalities and disciplined characters.

21. In those days. See on v. 19.

Chamberlains. Literally, “eunuchs.”

The door. Literally, the “threshold.” Bigthan and Teresh were apparently eunuchs responsible for guarding the entrance to the king’s private quarters, perhaps his sleeping apartment. Their position of high trust gave the conspirators an advantage. History records the fact that Xerxes eventually lost his life in a conspiracy of the kind here described.

22. Known to Mordecai. Josephus (*Antiquities* xi. 6. 4), the Jewish historian, tells of a certain slave who betrayed the conspirators to Mordecai.

23. Inquisition was made. That is, an investigation.

It was found out. Or, “it was found to be so.”

Hanged on a tree. That is, impaled, as traitors and rebels were commonly treated in Persia (see on Ezra 6:11).

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

17 PK 601

19, 21 5T 450

CHAPTER 3

1 *Haman, advanced by the king, and despised by Mordecai, seeketh revenge upon all the Jews. 7 He casteth lots. 8 He obtaineth by calumnation a decree of the king to put the Jews to death.*

1. After these things. An indefinite lapse of time is thus indicated, perhaps of considerable duration. The events of this chapter fell in the year 474 B.C., the 12th year of Ahasuerus’ reign (see v. 7).

Haman. Ahasuerus was introduced first (ch. 1), then Mordecai and Esther (ch. 2); now Haman appears on the scene, as grand vizier, or prime minister. According to Jewish tradition, Haman was a direct descendant of Agag, king of the Amalekites (see 1 Sam. 15:8), in the 16th generation (*Targum Sheni*; Josephus *Antiquities* xi. 6. 5).

2. The king’s servants. These were the lesser officers of the court, of the rank to which Mordecai belonged.

Bowed, and revered. That is, prostrated themselves before Haman in usual Oriental fashion. This act implied submission, loyalty, and obedience.

Commanded. Perhaps Haman had been elevated from a low position. The special command required that all, even those who might previously have outranked Haman, should now fall prostrate before him.

Mordecai bowed not. In view of the fact that the Hebrew people prostrated themselves not only before kings (1 Sam. 24:8) but before superiors in general, or those whom they wished to honor as such (Gen. 23:7; 27:29; 33:3; etc.), Mordecai’s motive in refusing to bow to Haman is not entirely clear. Haman was, to be sure, a Gentile; but Abraham bowed to Gentiles (Gen. 23:7). Mordecai did refuse Haman reverence that belongs only to God (5T 450; see PK 600).

4. *They spake daily.* The persistent attempt made to secure Mordecai's compliance with the edict to bow before Haman implies that his fellow officials esteemed him highly. They sought to give him a fair opportunity before reporting the matter. From their point of view it was a serious precedent—if one royal decree could thus be flouted, how about others?

He had told them. Mordecai probably explained that his religion made it impossible to worship any man. Apparently, Mordecai's race had not been suspected. In appearance and language he and Esther both seem to have passed as Persians.

5. *When Haman saw.* Mordecai's disrespect apparently came to Haman's attention only through the "king's servants." Mordecai's attitude and explanation meant that Jews everywhere stood opposed to Haman. Mordecai's apparent defiance, boldly displayed at the very gate of the palace, could mean but one thing to Haman—conspiracy! At least, Haman was pleased to interpret it so. And if Mordecai justified his course on a religious basis, all who held that religion must therefore be involved also.

6. *Thought scorn.* If Haman had simply informed Xerxes that one of the minor court officials was insulting him and thereby disobeying a royal edict, Ahasuerus would certainly have ordered Mordecai put to death. But Mordecai, *as a Jew*, had insulted him, and therefore the Jews as a nation should be punished. If the Jews and their religion stood in the way of Haman's pride and security, both must be sacrificed.

Sought to destroy. Massacres on a large scale have been common in many non-Christian lands, where human life is generally considered to be of little value and the caprice of absolute monarchs often determines whether men shall live or die. Nearly half a century before this, upon the accession of Darius Hystaspes, the father of Xerxes, there had been a general massacre of the Magi, and a general massacre of the Scythians had occurred another half century before that.

7. *Nisan.* Among the Jews this name replaced Abib after the Captivity.

The twelfth year. April 5, 474 B.C., to April 21, 473 B.C., according to Persian reckoning.

They cast Pur. The superstitious casting of lots, as a means of determining favorable times for certain projects, has been common in the East since time immemorial. Lots were drawn by means of dice, by chips of wood, by strips of parchment, by white and black stones, and in other ways. The Jews supposed that a special dispensation of Providence supervised the casting of lots (Prov. 16:33), and thought that matters decided in this way were according to God's will. Haman appears to have cast lots, first to determine the day of the month, and then the month.

It cannot be discovered from the context whether Haman cast lots to determine a favorable date for proposing his scheme to the king or for the execution of the decree of extermination. Neither is it certain whether the process of casting of lots was extended over a period of several months or whether it was conducted at one time, to determine the supposedly auspicious time. The Hebrew reading of the text may possibly imply the former (see p. 460).

Adar. The lot apparently indicated the thirteenth day of Adar, the twelfth and last month of the year. Like Nisan, Adar is a Babylonian name. Adar corresponds to our month of March (see Vol. II, p. 108).

8. *A certain people.* A large proportion of the Jewish exiles had elected to remain in the lands to which they had been carried away captive. Josephus notes that the more well-

to-do and influential Babylonian Jews were little inclined to leave their adopted home. By now, there was evidently a large Jewish colony at Shushan also (see ch. 9:12–15).

Their laws are diverse. A true charge, but a weak argument for their destruction, more especially since the Persians allowed all subject nations to retain their own religions, laws, and customs.

Neither keep they. This charge was not true with respect to laws in general. It was only when a royal edict required a Jew to violate his religious beliefs that such a situation could arise. But the laws of the Medes and Persians were in the main fair and just, and the Jews no doubt readily obeyed them. Had it been otherwise they would not have enjoyed the favor that was often shown them. Through the prophet Jeremiah, God strictly enjoined them to be law-abiding, peaceful subjects wherever they might be (Jer. 29:7).

9. I will pay. Even Ahasuerus could scarcely consider as a light matter such an act of genocide as Haman contemplated, but Haman immediately fortified his proposal with a bribe such as even a king could not view with indifference.

Ten thousand talents. Based on the light Babylonian talent, this would be about 377 tons, or 343 metric tons (see Vol. I, pp. 168, 169). Herodotus says that Xerxes (Ahasuerus) once declined such an offer from one of his subjects. The recent Greek war had no doubt made a heavy drain on the royal treasury, but it would be beneath the king's dignity, perhaps, to accept a bribe.

10. His ring. Literally, "his signet." This was probably a ring, for signet rings were known to the Persians, though some think it was a cylinder like that of his father Darius, now in the British Museum. In possession of the royal seal, Haman had power to issue whatever edicts he desired, for the royal seal would give them full authority. Haman's word was thus equal to that of the king, who in effect gave Haman blanket permission to do what he desired.

11. The silver. Ahasuerus seems to have declined the bribe (see on v. 9).

12. The king's scribes. Herodotus says that "scribes" were in attendance on Xerxes throughout the Grecian war. Such persons would also be at hand in the palace, ready to draw up royal edicts.

Lieutenants. Heb., *'achashdarpenim*, "satraps," a Hebrew transliteration of the Persian *khshatřapâvan*, from which our "satrap" is derived. According to Herodotus, there were 20 satrapies in the time of Darius I. These were major divisions of the empire, each composed of several provinces.

The governors. That is, of the 127 provinces (see ch. 1:1). Several "governors" were responsible to each satrap.

The rulers. Or, "princes," as in ch. 1:3; etc. These would be the native rulers or the head men of conquered tribes, who enjoyed considerable local autonomy.

13. By posts. The Persian postal system was famous throughout the ancient world. Xenophon attributes the organization of the system to Cyrus. Xenophon described it as follows:

"Stables for horses are erected along the various lines of route, at such a distance one from another as a horse can accomplish in a day. All the stables are provided with a number of horses and grooms. There is a post-master to preside over each, who receives the dispatches along with the tired men and horses, and sends them on by fresh horses and fresh riders. Sometimes there is no stoppage in the conveyance even at night; since a night courier takes up the work of the day courier and continues it. It has been said that

these posts outstrip the flight of birds, which is not altogether true; but beyond a doubt it is the most rapid conveyance by land.”

To destroy. Here the writer of the book of Esther apparently quotes directly from the edict. Note the involved legal phraseology.

Young and old. In ancient times, to take the father’s life and spare that of the child was thought to be folly. Wives and children of criminals were put to death with their husbands and fathers, as a matter of course. Even the Jews sometimes followed this practice (Joshua 7:24, 25; 2 Kings 9:26).

The thirteenth day. The LXX, which contains an alleged copy of the decree, has “the fourteenth day,” but agrees with the Hebrew text here by making the 14th the actual day of the struggle (ch. 9:1). The 14th and 15th are the days now kept by the Jews (see ch. 9:14–21).

At this point the LXX inserts a copy of what purports to be a letter written by Artaxerxes, as Ahasuerus is called in the LXX. Though the genuineness of this letter is unattested, it is nevertheless of interest in connection with the comparison drawn between the decree of Ahasuerus against the Jews and that eventually to be issued against God’s people (see PK 605):

“Now this is the copy of the letter: The great King Artaxerxes writes these things to the governors of 127 provinces from India to Ethiopia, and to the officials that are subject to them. After I became lord over many nations, and had dominion over the whole world, without being lifted up with presumption of my authority, but carrying myself always with equity and mildness, I purposed to settle my subjects continually in a quiet life; and, by making my kingdom peaceable, and open for passage to the utmost coasts, to renew peace, which is desired by all men.

“Now when I asked my counselors how this might be brought to pass, Haman, that excelled in wisdom among us, and was approved for his constant good will and steadfast fidelity, and had the honour of the second place in the kingdom, declared unto us, that in all nations throughout the world there was scattered a certain malignant people, that had laws contrary to all nations, and continually set aside the commandments of kings, so that the union honourably intended by us, cannot be established.

“Seeing then we understand that this nation is alone continually in opposition to all men, following by their laws an alien life, and evil-affected to our state, working all the mischief they can, that our kingdom may not be firmly established: therefore have we commanded, that they that are indicated in writing unto you by Haman, who is ordained over the affairs, and is a second father unto us, shall all, with their wives and children, be utterly destroyed by the sword of their enemies, without any mercy or pity, on the fourteenth day of the twelfth month Adar of this present year: so that they who of old and now also are malicious, may in one day with violence go down to Hades, and so ever hereafter cause our affairs to be well settled, and without trouble.”

14. The copy of the writing. The RSV of v. 14 reads: “A copy of the document was to be issued as a decree in every province by proclamation to all the peoples to be ready for that day.”

15. The posts went out. The most remote parts of the empire could be reached in a month, or at the most two months. Thus there was no need of haste. But Haman was impatient, fearing, perhaps, lest the king should change his mind and decline to publish the edict.

Sat down to drink. Insertion of this detail in the narrative seems intended to stress the hardness of heart of the king and of Haman. Having consigned a nation to destruction, they proceeded to enjoy themselves at a banquet of wine.

The city Shushan. The bulk of the inhabitants were probably Persians and Elamites, but there may have been a widespread feeling among persons of other nationalities that the precedent now set was a dangerous one. Generally the people of the capital city approved whatever the great king did. Now they appear to doubt the prudence and justice of what he had done. It is possible, however, that the writer refers to the Jews resident in the capital city rather than to the entire population.

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1–15PK 600; 5T 450

CHAPTER 4

1 *The great mourning of Mordecai and the Jews.* 4 *Esther, understanding it, sendeth to Mordecai, who sheweth the cause, and adviseth her to undertake the suit.* 10 *She excusing herself is threatened by Mordecai.* 15 *She appointing a fast undertaketh the suit.*

1. Rent his clothes. The rending of one's garments was a sign of deep sorrow, distress, horror, or resentment. The Scriptures note many instances in which emotion was expressed thus (Gen. 37:34; 44:13; Joshua 7:6; Judges 11:35; 2 Sam. 1:11; etc.). The meaning of Mordecai's act was probably well understood by the Persians as well as the Jews.

Sackcloth with ashes. The wearing of sackcloth and ashes was another symbol of profound grief. The Bible refers to numerous occasions when men wore these emblems of sorrow (see Gen. 37:34; 1 Kings 20:32; Isa. 37:2; Dan. 9:3; Jonah 3:6; etc.). Having read the edict, Mordecai must have at once perceived its origin and the motive that prompted it. His first impulse would naturally be to rend his garments and to put on sackcloth and ashes. But the palace was not considered to be an appropriate place for the demonstration of private grief. To be sure, Mordecai was not alone in feeling sorrow and consternation. In Shushan and throughout the provinces the doomed race made bitter lamentation. Hope that there might yet be deliverance from the decree seems not to have occurred to any.

2. Before the king's gate. Mordecai apparently felt no impulse to hide his grief. He now came to the palace with the obvious purpose of informing Esther of the decree.

3. In every province. The Scripture account implies that by this time the Jews were scattered everywhere throughout the Persian Empire.

Many. Rather, "most of them."

4. Esther's maids. In addition to her train of maids, an Oriental queen had a numerous body of eunuchs at her disposal, who went on errands for her and maintained her contact with the world outside the palace. In great distress, Esther manifested her concern by sending clothing out to her foster father to replace the sackcloth. Esther's purpose was probably to make it possible for Mordecai to enter the palace.

He received it not. Mordecai was not wearing sackcloth because he lacked better clothing. He felt no need of seeing Esther directly, and probably thought it inadvisable to do so under the circumstances.

5. Hatach. The king had appointed the head eunuch to wait upon the queen, partly to serve her and partly to observe her conduct. No despot is ever exempt from the twin fears of jealousy and suspicion.

6. So Hatach went forth. Mordecai refused to enter the palace. Esther could not leave it, and so resorted to the typically Oriental procedure of using a middleman.

7. The sum of the money. See on ch. 3:9. How Mordecai knew of the money Haman had offered to pay Xerxes by way of compensation for the loss of revenue that would result from the extermination of the Jews, is not stated. It would hardly be stipulated in the decree, even if Ahasuerus accepted it, which possibility seems unlikely (see on ch. 3:11).

8. To make request before him. Esther's maids and eunuchs certainly knew of her interest in Mordecai (see ch. 2:10–22) and may already have learned of her nationality (see ch. 3:4). In defense of his refusal to bow to Haman, Mordecai had already been compelled to declare his nationality (ch. 3:4). Now, circumstances require Esther to do likewise (see ch. 2:10); she must go before the king to make supplication for her people. But she cannot plead for the Jews as *her* people without being subject to their fate as decreed in the edict of Haman. There was no alternative. For better or for worse, and irrespective of her own choice in the matter, her personal fate was inevitably linked with that of her people, and both hung precariously on Ahasuerus' regard for her. She had now been queen for a little more than four years. Her demeanor and conduct had been a large factor in influencing the king's attitude toward her. Everything depended upon the quiet witness borne by her life during the past four years, and upon her tact, patience, and good judgment now.

11. One law. Such a law was not entirely arbitrary. How often presumed friends or seemingly harmless strangers had approached royalty, with the objective of murder. This law was probably a measure to protect the king from harm, from troublesome petitioners, and from interference in the exercise of his despotic rule.

Not been called. For the time being it seemed that the king had forgotten her. It might be weeks or months before she would be summoned before him. In the normal course of events she could not expect a favorable opportunity in the near future.

13. Think not with thyself. That is, "imagine not in your mind." Her favored position would not protect her from Haman's wrath. Her racial identity was known to at least some in the palace (see on v. 8), and those who had informed Haman concerning Mordecai could be expected to do the same with regard to Esther. Haman would not feel safe so long as any Jew remained alive, particularly one so close to the king and so favored as Esther.

14. Enlargement. Literally, "respite" or "relief," from the same root as the word for "breath." Mordecai affirms trust in God's gracious promises and conviction that Haman's purposes will be frustrated. He does not know how, but is convinced that in one way or another deliverance will come.

Thy father's house. If Esther thought only of saving her own life, she would lose it (see Matt. 10:39). Unwillingness to die implied the certainty of death; life was to be purchased at the price of willingness to lose it. Mordecai's reference to extinction of Esther's family line implies that she was her father's only child. The fact that Esther's cousin Mordecai became her foster father supports this implication. Had Esther had an older brother or sister, Mordecai would not have needed to adopt her. Mordecai seems to have been Esther's only near, living relative.

Come to the kingdom. Mordecai perceived the outworking of Divine Providence. Perhaps no more dramatic challenge to courage, loyalty, and self-sacrifice ever

confronted a representative of the kingdom of heaven. But the challenge to us today is no less imperative and no less real.

Esther, conscious that without sustaining confidence in God her task would prove unavailing, needed the prayers of her people. What she was about to do was on behalf of their lives as well as her own. Never did so many owe so much to the courage, tact, and self-sacrifice of one young woman.

16. Fast ye for me. Esther personally felt the need of knowing that her people shared with her the burden that fell primarily to her to bear.

Three days. Some have supposed that Esther did not mean complete abstinence from both food and drink for so long a period of time. The time intended may have been only from the evening of the first day to the morning of the third day, a period not much in excess of 36 hours (see on ch. 5:1; Vol. II, pp. 136, 137).

I also. The clarity of mind that often results from fasting would prepare her to perceive the will of God and to know how to cooperate intelligently with it.

If I perish. Esther means, "If I lose my life in this attempt to save my people, I shall lose it cheerfully; I see it is my duty to make the attempt; come what will, I am resolved to do my best."

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

3 PK 601

14 Ed 263; ML 64; PK 601; 5T 321

16 PK 601; 1T 16

CHAPTER 5

1 *Esther, adventuring on the king's favour, obtaineth the grace of the golden sceptre, and inviteth the king and Haman to a banquet. 6 She, being encouraged by the king in her suit, inviteth them to another banquet the next day. 9 Haman, proud of his advancement, repineth at the contempt of Mordecai. 14 By the counsel of Zeresh he buildeth for him a pair of gallows.*

1. On the third day. That is, the third day of the fast (ch. 4:16). Esther and her maidens, who may also have been Jews, had eaten nothing since some time on the first day, nothing throughout the second day, and nothing on the morning of the third day (see ch. 4:16).

Put on her royal apparel. While fasting, Esther had perhaps worn sackcloth and ashes, but these she now exchanged for the splendor of her royal attire. Leaving the women's apartments of the palace area, Esther passed through the garden probably surrounding the royal hall, and entered the court, immediately in front of the open throne hall (see on ch. 1:5). Taking up a position directly in front of the throne, but at a distance from it, with the object of attracting the king's attention, Esther awaited his pleasure. She knew that at the hour of her coming he would be seated upon his throne and could not fail to see her.

Over against the gate. That is, opposite the entrance to the hall. The throne, which faced the main entrance, was probably on an elevated platform. Seated on his throne, the king would therefore command a view of the entrance and court beyond, through the middle avenue of columns (see on ch. 1:5).

2. Touched the top. Extension of the scepter indicated royal favor and acceptance; touching the scepter signified acknowledgment of the favor thus displayed. By entering the inner court Esther had already violated the law (ch. 4:11; cf. ch. 6:4). Ahasuerus must

have recognized that only a pressing emergency would have led Esther to approach the throne unsummoned.

3. *Thy request.* The granting of requests before they had been expressed was a common gesture of good will practiced by Oriental monarchs. According to Herodotus, there was one day in the year on which the king was bound to grant any request made by a guest at his table. Esther's coming made it evident that she had an urgent request to present.

Half of the kingdom. A further evidence of royal favor (see Mark 6:23).

4. *Come this day.* Such an invitation must have been somewhat unusual. Ordinarily the king and queen dined separately. But for the queen to invite another male guest in addition to the king was most unusual, and seemed to the recipient of the invitation a high favor. Ahasuerus probably remembered Vashti's refusal to attend his banquet. The unusual nature of Esther's invitation, together with the fact that it was presented in person, must have startled and intrigued the king. His royal curiosity was granted several hours in which to run riot and intensify itself.

6. *What is thy petition?* Ahasuerus understood, of course, that it was not for the mere pleasure of entertaining him and his prime minister at a banquet that Esther had risked her life by approaching his throne unsummoned.

8. *If it please the king.* Esther gained much by delaying another day to state her request. Most of all, perhaps, Ahasuerus would doubtless be impressed that her appeal was not only a life-and-death matter to her personally—implied by her sudden appearance before him earlier that day—but that it was a deliberate, considerate appeal and not a momentary impulse. Furthermore, delay would heighten the king's curiosity (see on v. 4), and thus prepare him the more thoroughly for what would, under any circumstances, come as a great shock. And for Esther, the delay would mean time in which to pray and weigh carefully how she should present her appeal, time to seek composure before she should voice it. Though Esther knew it not as yet, Providence ordained the delay, the better to prepare the mind of the king (ch. 6:1–11).

9. *Stood not up, nor moved.* Or, "neither rose nor trembled" (RSV). Condemned to death by Haman's decree, Mordecai boldly defied the perpetrator of the crime. His presence in the king's gate is evidence that he no longer wore sackcloth (ch. 4:2) as he had two days before. Without doubt he knew of Esther's favorable acceptance by the king, and believed that her plan would be crowned with success.

10. *Refrained himself.* Though passionately angry at Mordecai personally, Haman considered it beneath his dignity to notice him.

11. *His riches.* See on ch. 3:9.

His children. Literally, "of his sons." According to ch. 9:7–10, Haman had ten sons. To be the father of many sons was accounted highly honorable by the Persians as by other Orientals.

13. *Availeth me nothing.* Haman had not learned the wisdom of setting pleasure against pain, joy against sorrow, satisfaction against annoyance. Nor had he taught himself to look upon the vexations and trials of life as blessings in disguise. In spite of his seeming self-control, and in spite of the fact that he was the prime minister of the mighty Persian Empire, his nature was little better than that of a savage. Worldly greatness is little proof of either greatness or goodness of soul.

14. Gallows. Literally, “tree.” Ordinarily, the Persians did not hang men, but executed them by impalement (see on ch. 2:23).

Fifty cubits high. Approximately 73 ft. (22.3 m.; see Vol. I, p. 165). This recurs in ch. 7:9, where it is added that the gallows was erected at Haman’s house. Persian houses had an interior “patio,” or court, as is the custom with Spanish houses. The height of the gallows was probably for the purpose of making the execution of Mordecai visible throughout the city.

Speak thou. Haman’s friends assumed that the immediate execution of one Jew would be permitted at the request of the chief minister.

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

2, 5 PK 602
1

CHAPTER 6

1 *Ahasuerus, reading in the chronicles of the good service done by Mordecai, taketh care for his reward.* 4 *Haman, coming to sue that Mordecai might be hanged, unawares giveth counsel that he might do him honour.* 12 *Complaining of his misfortune, his friends tell him of his final destiny.*

The Persian Empire at its Greatest Extent

2

¹Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Es 1:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

²Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Es 6:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.



1. Could not the king sleep. Literally, “the king’s sleep fled away.” Perhaps he was trying to divine what Esther’s request would be. Once before, she had hastened to Ahasuerus with startling information (ch. 2:21, 22). It is not likely that upon that occasion, either, Esther had been content to await a royal summons; the matter was urgent. As the hours of the night wore on the king’s curiosity and imagination no doubt invented all kinds of possible plots against his life. To refresh his own memory of the incident, and perhaps in the fear that some of the conspirators had escaped detection, the king called for the reading of the record. Furthermore, the fact that Esther had invited Haman strongly implied that he was in some way involved—but whether as friend or foe, the king could not tell. Little wonder that the king could not sleep!

Book of records. In chs. 2:23 and 10:2 the same book seems to be referred to, though the title is given more briefly as “the book of the chronicles.”

They were read. Possibly, the king himself could not read. More probably, however, special servants were assigned to the task of reading. In those days writing and reading were highly specialized arts, in which only those who devoted their time to them could hope to become proficient in them.

2. It was found written. See ch. 2:21–23.

3. What honour and dignity. In any country one discovering a conspiracy against the life of the king would be considered entitled to a handsome reward. In Persia, where “royal benefactors” formed a distinct class and had their names inscribed on a special list, it was especially incumbent on the monarch to see that such a person should receive a reward proportionate to the value of his service. Though unable to recall what it was,

Ahasuerus seems to have supposed that some honor or dignity must have been conferred on Mordecai. According to ch. 3:1, it was soon after this conspiracy—possibly in consequence of it—that Haman was promoted by Ahasuerus. It has been suggested that Haman may have in some way contrived to take the credit for bringing the conspiracy to light.

4. *Who is in the court?* Perhaps it was scarcely light when Haman arrived—light enough for his presence, but not his identity, to be detected. Early morning is a common time for the transaction of business at an Eastern court. Haman’s anxiety to conclude his plan with regard to Mordecai, ere the hour appointed for the second banquet should arrive, impelled him to come early in the hope of securing, if possible, the first audience. It was his undue haste to effect Mordecai’s destruction that led to his being the person chosen by the king to do Mordecai the highest honor. How often pride precedes destruction, and a haughty spirit, a fall (Prov. 16:18).

5. *Behold, Haman.* Even if others were in the court awaiting an audience with the king, they would defer to a higher official such as Haman.

6. *What shall be done?* Literally, “what to do” (see ch. 1:15).

Thought in his heart. Literally, “said [to himself] in his heart.”

8. *The king useth to wear.* Or, “the king has worn.” To wear a garment previously worn by the king was, under ordinary circumstances, a breach of Persian law punishable by death. It implied that the wearer thought to assume royal authority. The king, of course, could authorize an exception as a special mark of personal favor.

Horse that the king rideth. Literally, “the horse which the king has ridden” (RSV; cf. Gen. 41:43; 1 Kings 1:33).

9. *Most noble princes.* Alas for Haman! Thinking to be the recipient of honor, he finds himself the “noble prince” appointed to bestow it—upon his worst enemy.

10. *Make haste.* The king will brook no further delay in a matter that has already waited far too long.

Mordecai the Jew. Mordecai’s nationality and occupation were undoubtedly noted in the book of the chronicles from which the servant had read that night, and from which the king had probably learned the facts he now states. He may, indeed, have used the very expression that appeared in the account.

11. *Then took Haman.* There was no ground on which Haman could decline the duty the king had imposed upon him. Upon becoming prime minister he himself should have read the chronicles to ascertain whether there was any unfinished business for him to carry out. Now he himself must do what he had told the king should be done by a noble prince.

12. *Came again.* Mordecai returned to his former condition and employment. The king considered the honor thus shown Mordecai a sufficient reward. From an Oriental point of view, this would have been of more symbolic and practical value than a cash reward.

His head covered. A sign of mourning (see 2 Sam. 15:30).

13. *His wise men.* Haman seems to have had his own Magian counselors—his cabinet. Herodotus speaks of the supposed prophetic powers of the Persian Magians.

14. *Hasted to bring Haman.* Oriental courtesy requires a host to send an escort to accompany guests invited to a banquet or other entertainment (see Luke 14:17).

One great purpose of the writer is to show that he who lays a snare for his neighbor's life is in grave danger of falling into the snare himself. Men often meet with the very evils they have sought to inflict upon others (see Matt. 7:2).

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1, 10, 11 PK 602

CHAPTER 7

1 *Esther, entertaining the king and Haman, maketh suit for her own life and her people's. 5 She accuseth Haman. 7 The king in his anger, understanding of the gallows which Haman had made for Mordecai, causeth him to be hanged thereon.*

1. To banquet. Literally, "to drink." At Persian feasts comparatively little solid food was eaten. The time was mainly passed in drinking and in eating delicacies we would call desserts.

2. The king said again. For the third time Ahasuerus invites Esther to make her request known. By now he must have been curious indeed to learn what it might be.

At the banquet of wine. Literally, "in the drinking of the wine." This indicates that the main part of the feast was over at the time the king again raised the question.

3. Let my life. It mattered little to the king that thousands of his subjects were to be slain; their interests were no concern of his. He had been content with Haman's accusation that the Jews were lawless. But if the decree touched Esther—that was another matter. Her character, her loyalty and devotion, were far above suspicion. She meant something to him. The queen handled the matter with tact and skill, introducing the subject in a manner calculated to appeal personally to the king. Her life was threatened; she, the queen, was in mortal danger!

4. We are sold. It is not clear whether Ahasuerus had actually agreed to accept Haman's bribe (see on chs. 3:9, 11; 4:7), or whether Esther here speaks in more figurative language.

To be destroyed. The three synonymous expressions, of which this is first, are quoted from the decree itself (ch. 3:13).

Although. There is some difference of opinion as to the true meaning of the statement thus introduced. It may be Esther means that the money Haman has paid cannot equal the loss the king will suffer through the death of his Jewish subjects. Or, it may be Esther says, "Our affliction is not to be compared with the loss to the king" (RSV), meaning that the execution of the decree would bring greater loss to the king than even to the Jews themselves, or that their suffering was a matter of less moment than any danger that might threaten the throne through them. What harms them will harm the king.

6. Adversary and enemy. With the word "enemy" Esther used at first (v. 4), she now couples an even stronger word, "adversary," or "foe."

7. The palace garden. See on ch. 1:5.

Evil determined. Haman perceived from the attitude of the king that the prediction of his wise men, that he would "surely fall" (ch. 6:13), was in process of coming true. Realizing Esther's influence over the king, he implored her to intercede for him.

8. The king returned. Upon his return Ahasuerus either misconstrues Haman's posture as a planned attack upon the queen, or in his anger pretends so to interpret it.

Covered Haman's face. This signified that Haman was to die. Greek and Roman writers attest this custom.

9. Harbonah. See ch. 1:10. Perhaps Harbonah was one of the king's chamberlains sent earlier that very day to summon Haman to the feast (see ch. 6:14); and if so, he then saw the gallows personally (see ch. 5:14).

Spoken good for the king. Or, "whose word saved the king" (RSV). This is a reference to Mordecai's detection of the conspiracy against the king (ch. 2:21–23).

In the house of Haman. This fact emphasizes Haman's cruelty. No more appropriate means could be found for executing the wretch. The punishment fitted the crime (see Ps. 7:13–16; 9:15) to perfection.

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

5–10PK 602

CHAPTER 8

1 *Mordecai is advanced.* 3 *Esther maketh suit to reverse Haman's letters.* 7 *Ahasuerus granteth to the Jews to defend themselves.* 15 *Mordecai's honour, and the Jews' joy.*

1. The house of Haman. When a criminal was executed all his property was forfeited to the king, who disposed of it according to his pleasure. It pleased Ahasuerus to bestow upon Esther all the possessions of Haman, who seems to have been a man of vast wealth (see on ch. 3:9).

The Jews' enemy. As Haman is characterized hereafter (see ch. 9:10, 24).

Came before the king. Mordecai was appointed to the position that had been Haman's. He was made grand vizier, or prime minister—a high official who ministered to the king personally and was in constant attendance upon him.

Esther had told. Apparently she had not done so before the emergency arose. There was no need of further concealment now that Mordecai had been recognized as a "king's benefactor" (see chs. 2:21–23; 6:3–11), and since Esther had been compelled to confess herself a Jewess in order to save her people.

2. Took off his ring. The ring had, of course, been taken from Haman and returned to Ahasuerus. This ring was a symbol of royal authority, and bore upon it the royal seal (see on ch. 3:10).

Set Mordecai. The possessions of Haman had been forfeited to the crown and assigned to the custody of Esther (see on v. 1). She was not at liberty to give away what she had received in trust from the king and held by virtue of her position as queen. Thus Esther did not make Mordecai a gift of the house but set him over it. For all practical purposes this was equivalent to a gift. He was thus provided with a residence suitable to his new dignity as prime minister.

3. Fell down at his feet. A gesture of complete submission, not worship, common in Oriental lands (see on ch. 3:2–5).

Besought him with tears. Esther's approach was still that of emotion; she appealed to the king on the basis of his regard for her personally.

Put away the mischief. Or, "make void the evil plot."

Though Mordecai was in possession of the royal signet, he would not dare to use it to give authority to a new decree that would countermand one already issued by the king personally.

4. Held out the golden sceptre. The king probably extended his scepter on this occasion not only as a token of favor toward Esther and of willingness to give her an audience but also as an indication of willingness to do as Esther desired and thereby undo the evil effected by the decree of Haman.

5. *If it please the king.* In her petition Esther unites an appeal to the king's sense of right and justice with an even more effective appeal to his regard for her personally. He would not refuse her request.

Reverse. Or, "revoke."

6. *How can I endure?* Esther still bases her appeal on personal considerations, thus evincing regard for the bond that linked her interests with those of her people.

7. *The king Ahasuerus said.* Ahasuerus proposes a solution, after first reminding Esther and Mordecai of evidence of his favorable attitude toward the Jews.

8. *Write ye also.* That is, in addition to and to supersede the one written by Haman (see ch. 3:12).

For the Jews. More exactly, "concerning the Jews." The new decree was to be addressed to the Jews rather than to the Persians, as was that of Haman.

As it liketh you. Or, "as you like it."

9. *The king's scribes.* In deference to the Persian legal custom by which a royal edict was unalterable, Mordecai successfully devised a means of counteracting the effects of Haman's decree without actually revoking it. The resulting decree was published in every language, copies being made by the royal stenographers (see ch. 3:12).

The third month. It is not certain whether this was in the 12th or the 13th year of Ahasuerus (p. 460; see on ch. 3:7, cf. v. 12). In the former case, the date would be June 25, 474 B.C.; in the latter, July 12, 473 B.C. In either case, it was 2 months and 10 days after the proclamation of Haman's decree, and 8 months and 19 or 20 days before it was to become effective.

This, the longest verse in the Bible, contains 43 Hebrew words, or 192 letters.

10. *Wrote in the king Ahasuerus' name.* Compare ch. 3:12–15.

Mules, camels, and young dromedaries. The Hebrew thus translated is obscure and its intent uncertain. The writers of the Talmud confess ignorance as to the meaning, and the LXX makes no attempt at translation. In each instance of its use in the OT the word here translated "mules" denotes royal "steeds," probably horses of a superior breed. In Micah 1:13, the Hebrew referring to chariot horses is translated "swift beast," and in 1 Kings 4:28, "dromedaries." The word translated "camels" appears only here (in Esther 8:10) and in v. 14, and is not the usual word for "camels." It is, rather, a Persian loan word, the plural form of an adjective meaning "royal," and stands here in apposition to "mules." Together, these words probably mean "royal steeds." The word translated "dromedaries" is also of uncertain meaning. According to some it may mean "royal stud" or perhaps "thoroughbred." The RSV rendering of the latter part of v. 10 approximates the sense of the original words according to the suggestions here made: "mounted couriers riding on swift horses that were used in the king's service, bred from the royal stud."

11. *Together.* Cooperative effort on the part of the Jews would make of them a formidable force. The Jews have sometimes been spoken of as aggressors on the 13th of Adar, but of this there is no evidence. The edict clearly allowed them to stand only on the defensive.

To destroy. Compare the words of Haman's decree (ch. 3:13). Mordecai's decree granted equal rights to the Jews by according them every opportunity to protect themselves.

The spoil. That is, the property. The former edict had given the same permission to the Jews' enemies (ch. 3:13).

13. The copy. Verse 13 is practically identical with ch. 3:14, which speaks concerning Haman's decree.

14. Mules and camels. See on v. 10. This verse repeats ch. 3:15, with a slight addition. The posts bearing Mordecai's decree were to be "pressed on" with greater urgency than those bearing Haman's decree, perhaps in the fear that, in some instances, enemies of the Jews might take advantage of the provisions of Haman's decree in advance of the time designated for their execution.

15. Royal apparel. The Persian monarch is said to have worn a purple robe and an inner vest of purple spots. Usually the robes of honor that he gave away were of other colors but of a single tint throughout. The one given to Mordecai seems to have been like that of the king.

A garment. Probably "a mantle" (RSV). There is some question as to what is meant by the term here translated "garment." Some of the best authorities think that reference is made to a long, flowing outer garment.

Shushan rejoiced. That is, in contrast to the perplexity occasioned by the first edict (see ch. 3:15). This may infer that the Persians, in general, sympathized with the Jews. Perhaps, too, other national minorities also disliked the first edict, which set a precedent that might mean their own ruin at a future time.

17. Became Jews. That is, they applied for and were granted the full status of Jewish proselytes. Compare the attitude of some of the Egyptians toward the Hebrews at the time that they left Egypt (see Ex. 12:38).

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

10-17PK 602

CHAPTER 9

1 *The Jews (the rulers, for fear of Mordecai, helping them) slay their enemies, with the ten sons of Haman.* 12 *Ahasuerus, at the request of Esther, granteth another day of slaughter, and Haman's sons to be hanged.* 20 *The two days of Purim are made festival.*

1. Power. Or, "mastery," as in Dan. 6:24.

2. Gathered. In harmony with the first provision of the edict.

In their cities. That is, wherever there were Jews.

Sought their hurt. The defensive character of the action of the Jews is emphasized. It was only against those who were known to be their enemies that they lifted so much as a finger.

3. Rulers. Or, "princes." The "lieutenants" were the satraps (see on ch. 3:12), each in charge of several provinces. The "deputies" were provincial "governors."

Officers of the king. Literally, as in the margin, "those which did the business that belonged to the king."

Helped the Jews. That is, "supported" or "upheld" the Jews, by means of moral support and perhaps armed force as well.

Fell upon them. Better, "had fallen on them." Mordecai's position had become known.

6. In Shushan the palace. This may refer either to the upper city, where the palace was situated, or to the vicinity of the palace, if not within its precincts. The palace hill covers more than 100 acres, of which the palace occupied nearly 20 acres (8.1 hectares).

On this hill are the remains of residences as well as of the palace itself. The area was probably densely populated.

10. *The ten sons of Haman.* It is interesting to note that the names of Haman's ten sons are Persian.

The spoil. The Jews sought to make it clear that they were not motivated by a desire for acquiring the spoil of their enemies.

11. *The number of those.* In ancient wars it was customary for the number of the slain to be carefully recorded. It would seem that on this occasion only a rough calculation was made; still, the king took care to be informed on the matter.

12. *What have they done?* Not a question, but an exclamation, as if the king had said: "What then have they done in the rest of the king's provinces!" How many must have been slain elsewhere if 500 were slain in Shushan alone.

13. *Let it be granted.* Why Esther asks for another day of slaughter is not clear. Nevertheless, she is not likely to have made this request without first consulting Mordecai, who certainly had means of knowing how matters stood. As chief minister over the whole nation, Mordecai probably knew that many foes of his people were still alive, and feared they might secure revenge. There is nothing to suggest that he was actuated by a blind spirit of revenge.

15. *For the Jews.* Rather, "So the Jews."

16. *Stood for their lives.* As provided in the edict (see ch. 8:11).

Had rest. That is, victory over their enemies. The Jews could now rest from their defensive efforts, without fear of reprisal.

Seventy and five thousand. The LXX has 15,000. The Hebrew may perhaps be translated "1,075." The smaller number is the more probable. See pp. 122, 123.

19. *The Jews of the villages.* This verse might better read, in part, "the Jews of the country, who dwelt in the country towns."

20. *Mordecai wrote.* It would seem that Mordecai first wrote to the provincial Jews, suggesting to them the future observance of two days of Purim instead of one, a custom they had first followed. He explained the reason for the suggestion of two days, without at first issuing a specific order. Finding his proposal well received (vs. 23–27), he sent a second letter with "all authority" (literally, "all strength"), enjoining the observance of the two days (v. 29).

22. *From sorrow to joy.* This was the keynote of the days of Purim, the dominating idea, to which all else was secondary and subordinate—sorrow turned into joy. This spirit still marks the celebration of Purim.

26. *Purim.* The Jews took the Persian word *pur*, "lot," and gave it a Hebrew plural. They may have chosen to use the plural form of the word because Haman cast lots repeatedly (ch. 3:7), or because the Jews celebrate the festival on two successive days.

They had seen. Mordecai's arguments have been confirmed by their own personal experience, by the recollection of what "had come unto them."

28. *These days of Purim.* The universal adoption of the Purim festival by the Jewish nation is a curious fact. Joiakim, the high priest at that time, must have given his approval to the feast from the first and incorporated it into the ecclesiastical calendar of the nation, or it would scarcely have become universal. It must have been by ecclesiastical, not by civil, command that the festival became obligatory. The Jews of the time resolved that the observance should be perpetual. Even today the feast is celebrated by Jews everywhere.

29. With all authority. Literally, “with all strength.”

This second letter. The first letter was the one mentioned in vs. 20–26. A second letter is now issued, “confirming” the observance. It went forth not as an edict, or in the king’s name, but as a letter in the names of Esther and Mordecai.

30. He sent the letters. Literally, “he sent letters,” or possibly, “letters were sent.” These were informal letters containing greetings “of peace and truth” (v. 30) and of fastings and lamentations (see v. 31).

32. The decree of Esther. Preferably, “a commandment of Esther.” Some further document, something in addition to the joint letter of Esther and Mordecai, seems intended.

The book. Possibly the canonical book of Esther.

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1, 2, 16 PK 602

CHAPTER 10

1 *Ahasuerus’s greatness.* 3 *Mordecai’s advancement.*

1. A tribute upon the land. Darius Hystaspes had been the first Persian monarch to levy universal taxes; but Xerxes (Ahasuerus) distinguished himself as a great raiser of tribute (see Dan. 11:2). The tribute would have to be adjusted from time to time, and Xerxes would be in dire need to raise taxes after his return from the disastrous campaign against Greece.

The isles. Or, “the coastlands,” in this case the maritime provinces bordering on the Mediterranean and the Aegean. These were occupied for a considerable time by Persian garrisons, even after the debacle in Greece, and would be included in any assessments Xerxes made. He may have continued to levy an assessment on the Aegean Islands, even though unable actually to collect it.

2. Kings of Media and Persia. It is striking that the author of the book of Esther recognizes the intimate connection between the two Iranian empires. One book, he observes, contains the records of both. Here Media is placed before Persia, on chronological grounds, because Median history antedated Persian history and was therefore accorded greater emphasis in the early part of “the book of the chronicles.”

3. Next unto king Ahasuerus. As grand vizier, or prime minister.

Accepted. Or, “popular with” (RSV).

The wealth. That is, “the welfare” of the Jews.

His seed. Here, probably, all Jews.

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

3 PK 602
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³Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Es 6:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.